2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

On the way back to Sharjah we passed a squat, white building about two miles from the town. It was built by a wealthy merchant of Dubai and presented to the town as a lazar, or leper hospital. Yet to this day it has never been used, for the local tradition is that it is haunted by a djinn, or evil spirit. Arabs suffering from leprosy, who have been turned out of the town, will prefer to stay in the open desert than enter the accursed house. Belief in djinns is very strong in Oman, though I have never before heard of a new building being haunted. It is probable, as with Chinese houses, that they are considered to be unlucky if they are built on a spot which has an evil reputation and is not protected by *fung-shui*, as the Cantonese call 'fortunate winds'.

That evening, accompanied by two officers from the Fort, I attended an Arab wedding which was held outside the sheikh's palace. The bridegroom was one of our mechanics; he already possessed one wife and three children, but he had recently been given a rise in pay and, being a true follower of the Prophet, wished to increase the dignity of his household. The marriage ceremony was held in the mosque and directly the happy couple emerged they were surrounded by a vast crowd of relatives, friends and sightseers. A small band, consisting of drums and pipes, led the procession, which soon grew to two or three hundred persons. Behind the band was the bridegroom, seated on a camel with two of his sons, his eyes tightly bandaged so that he should not see his bride, who followed blushingly on a donkey.

The procession halted in front of the palace and a rhythmic tune of pipe and drum sent the onlookers into a frenzied dance, in which we were expected to join. A young man in a green turban, whom I recognized as one of our bearers, leapt into the middle of the dancers and began to sing a passionate love-song. There was a good deal of abandon, giggling amongst the women, and flirtation, all the usual Arab restraint being flung to the winds. The music and dancing continued until sunset, when torches and flares were lit and the procession repaired to a village two miles away. We did not attend the nuptial feast, which I heard later ended in an orgy, with several broken heads, as I had another engagement at the Iraqui Levies' camp. I felt very sorry for the bridegroom's first wife; she was a sad and lonely figure on her little brown donkey, and seemed to be the only one who did not enjoy the carousing. This was not surprising,

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

since within a few days she was due to bear her amorous spouse a fourth child.

The Iraqui Levies, with whose officers I had dinner that evening, are the most famous regiment in the Middle East, which they have patrolled with quiet efficiency for many years. With their shorts and Anzac-type hats, decorated with a white egret plume, they are extremely smart in appearance and, in action, are fearless and bold fighters. The regiment is commanded by a brigadier whose headquarters are in Basrah, and all the senior officers are British. The remainder, as well as the troops themselves, are composed of Assyrians, Armenians and Yashidis recruited from all parts of the Middle East. The Assyrians, who are Christians, descendants of the race which has endured persecution for hundreds of years, are fine physical specimens and make first-rate soldiers, being loyal and mentally superior to most of the races found in the Iraq region. They are inclined to be stocky, with muscular bodies, and broad, copper-coloured faces; in many ways their features resemble those of the southern Turks.

We sat down in the open air at large trestle tables to a meal of roast lamb, curried rice, vegetables steamed in oil, and a pudding made of honey and pancakes. The Levies, having no Mohammedans in their ranks, have no inhibitions as regards alcohol, and the table looked like the bar of a West End hotel in peace-time. Some of the men got very merry on the fiery Cyprus brandy and began to sing the songs of their country.

The most interesting were the Yashidis, who are a community of 'Devil Worshippers' who come from a mountain stronghold called Tel-afar, on the borders of northern Iraq and the Syrian desert. Their worship of Satan is purely propitiatory, since they believe that if lip-service is paid to the Evil One he will forbear from causing them harm and will give them his protection. Membership of this community is revealed by the sign of a circle and a dot, which is tattooed on the forearm. The Yashidi are forbidden to mention or write the letter 'S', which, being the first letter of Shaitan's name, is considered by them to be sacred and unmentionable. Since my own name begins with this letter my hosts were very careful to prefix it with the characteristic 'O' of my Irish ancestors; to have referred to me simply as 'Shea' would have caused the Yashidis to regard me with suspicion, not to say hostility.

My name (which gives difficulty even to some English people),

2: Codrai G-3 (1948-1950) 1950 MK1 Oman
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Bedouin MJ4

000 Arab World, is made ghastly by this local scarcity of water, and they can be seen watching, and sometimes licking, the gloss which is the only indication of a slight trickle from a hole in the side of a house. At other times they try to keep cool by lying at the edge of the sea, until their thirst proves too great, and they take their last drink.

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Slavery still Exists

The population is predominantly Arab, but Persians, Baluchis, Somalis and Negroes make up a considerable section of the coast-dwellers. Many of the latter are slaves, and in this polyglot society, practising polygamy and concubinage, the Arab's blood is seldom free from non-Arab strains. Although the importation of slaves from Africa and Persia is officially said to have been abolished, there is no reason to suppose that this form of trading has ceased entirely; for Britain no longer exercises her right to search vessels, and the chances of any law-breaker getting caught are very small. In addition, children are still abducted from their villages by bedouin raiders, and are sold in the market at Biraimi, the neutral region in the desert about one hundred miles to the

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